

# Aesthetic Characteristics and Connotation of Straw Weaving Craftsmanship

Han Fu<sup>1</sup>, Mengxia Che<sup>2\*</sup>, Yue Chang<sup>3</sup>

College of Arts, Guilin University of Technology, Guilin, China

\*Corresponding author, e-mail: 1605684130@qq.com

**Abstract:** As an intangible cultural heritage of China, straw weaving craftsmanship has a long history, diverse weaving methods and unique skills. Its rich cultural charm can not only be used as functional utensils, but also as artistic expression of handicraft creators. However, in this ever-changing trend of the times, the closed and backward development of straw weaving craftsmanship has caused a serious disconnection between the supply and demand of straw weaving craftsmanship, and there is a huge gap between the development of straw weaving craftsmanship and people's high-level life and artistic pursuit. In view of the current phenomenon, starting from the theory of artistic aesthetic, this paper further explores the aesthetic characteristics and knitting craftsmanship of straw weaving, aiming to excavate and understand its aesthetic value, analyze the value implication from different perspectives, aesthetic symbol and artistic connotation embodied in traditional straw weaving craftsmanship, so as to provide beneficial supplement and reference for the inheritance and research of straw weaving. This paper mainly explores the form, material and culture of Chinese traditional straw weaving, and investigates the artistic characteristics expressed by the diversity of straw weaving culture. Finally, the historical value of straw weaving craftsmanship is analyzed to arouse people's attention to traditional culture.

**Keywords:** Straw weaving craftsmanship, Aesthetic characteristics, The value implication

## 1. Related Concepts of the Artistic Aesthetic Characteristics

Artistic aesthetics is an important branch of philosophy, also known as the philosophy of art. The subordinate scope of its philosophy requires us to objectively analyze the special laws and principles of artistic activities and artistic phenomena from reality. Aesthetics is about the philosophy of beauty, a discipline to seek the true nature of beauty and pursue beauty itself, and art can be a carrier of beauty, which will reflect the visual impact of a material or non-material. Philosophy is the supreme discipline of rationality, while art is the supreme discipline of sensibility, and the connection between the two is aesthetics. Using artistic aesthetics to guide art activities, and evaluating and analyzing art from aesthetic point of view is artistic aesthetics.

The aesthetic thought of artistic aesthetics is based on ‘the same philosophy’. From the standpoint of objective idealism, it emphasizes that beauty and art are absolute symbols and manifestations, claims that philosophy of art is the exploration of ‘absolute’ art, and holds that we can see different

archetypes of beauty in the special field of philosophy designated by philosophy of art [1].

Artistic aesthetics not only exists in the present. Whether in the history of the past or the future production activities, the beauty of art design is closely related to people. Artistic aesthetics is based on the judgment and analysis of the things that exist in reality. The content and depth of philosophy can be obtained from the raw materials, pattern elements and production techniques of a piece of work.

## 2. Overview of straw weaving theory

### 2.1 Understanding of Straw Weaving

Straw weaving is an ancient craftsmanship for weaving various utensils from the stems, branches, leaves and skins of herbaceous plants. In the long-term production practice and social life, straw weaving has gradually formed a unique form of expression integrating practicality, aesthetics and culture, bearing the wisdom and sweat of the grass-roots working people. A variety of signs show that straw weaving appeared before the primitive era, and scholars first discovered reed mats in The Hemudu archaeological site in Yuyao, Zhejiang province [2]. Some pottery products have been unearthed from neolithic sites with bamboo mats stuck to the bottom. By the Zhou Dynasty, straw mats had become common, and even the craftsmanship of weaving bowl mats was more exquisite. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, straw weaving products were not only widely used in the folk, but also the types of weaving objects are very rich, from straw mats to straw shoes and grass fans, as well as the futon used by monks for meditation. By the Tang Dynasty, straw weaving had become very famous. At the end of the 19th century, Chinese straw weaving began to be exported abroad. From the single straw mat in the primitive period to the rich diversity and exquisite craftsmanship of straw weaving daily necessities and handicrafts in the Tang, Song and Ming dynasties, with the continuous progress of human society and the continuous improvement of human pursuit of artistic beauty, the straw weaving craftsmanship is also constantly improved.

China's straw weaving resources are very rich, and the straw weaving craftsmanship is common. Due to the differences in raw materials, cultural traditions and other aspects, the straw weaving craftsmanship has certain regional characteristics. The quite famous are Shandong's wheat straw weaving, Sichuan's palm weaving, Guangdong's rattan weaving and so on. Straw weaving products are widely distributed in China. The main reasons are that straw weaving products for daily use are relatively cheap, the reserve of raw materials is large and the raw material is easy to obtain, and the weaving craftsmanship is easy to learn and spread. This handicraft is widely spread in the folk and has been inherited to the modern. From the perspective of design, the appearance of straw weaving products is to meet the functional needs at first, and then the expression form of straw weaving decoration and straw weaving art emerges to show people's aesthetic needs. The raw materials of straw weaving are renewable environmental materials, in line with the concept of green design, so as to meet the spiritual needs of people.

## 2.2 Analysis of Straw Weaving From the Perspective of Artistic Aesthetics

For thousands of years, folk weavers have inherited and developed the glorious tradition of China's weaving craftsmanship and created extremely rich technological forms and patterns elements. As Geertz said: 'Man is in great need of this kind of symbolic source to inspire him to find his position in the world, because the non-symbolic resources that have infiltrated into his body can only scatter a weak light. Culture is not merely an ornament of one's existence, but, as far as the main basis of its characteristics is concerned, a basic condition of one's existence [3].'

Handicrafts use local common materials as the main materials, supplemented by other materials as a scaffolds, collection, finishing, experiencing 10 more kinds of craftsmanship skills such as weaving, knitting, inserting, inlaying, insetting, winding, twining, pinning, winking, engraving, penetrating and so on [4]. Finally, several unique weaving methods are formed: picking and pressing method, braiding method, winding method, twisting method, trimming method, spiraling method, knitting method and so on, and then wave into a rich pattern pattern according to the effect of the pattern in order to create a more complex and changeable weaving craftsmanship, showing a more exquisite artistic modeling of craftsmen. Straw weaving craftsmanship contain very rich pattern symbols, most of which are formed at the same time in the process of weaving. Because most of the straw weaving craftsmanship has the characteristics of mesh interface, simple decoration, intersection of real and virtual, with concise and generous shape and complete structure, even simple basic pattern symbols can also produce the corresponding art form rules after continuous repeated rotation, giving people a distinct aesthetic feeling. The characteristics of straw weaving craftsmanship come from people's long-term practice. From the processing of raw materials to the diversity of weaving techniques, the exquisite decoration of products all reflect the wisdom of weaving craftsmen.

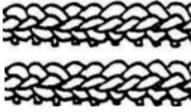
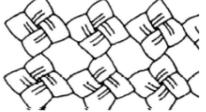
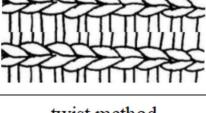
Weaving Methods of Traditional Straw Weaving Craftsmanship			
			
			
trimming method	plate method	knitting method	pick pressure method
			
			
braid method	winding method	twist method	

Figure 1 Weaving Methods of Traditional Straw Weaving Craftsmanship

### 3. The Artistic and Aesthetic Characteristics of Straw Weaving

With the development of modern design, designers have created a good way of life for people, and also caused great damage to the natural ecological environment. In this context, we began to reflect on the responsibility and role of designing. As one of the traditional folk craftsmanship, straw weaving craftsmanship is a kind of weaving craftsmanship that completely uses different straws as raw materials, covering the original and simple design concept. There is no lack of green design concept reflected in both materials and techniques [5]. Its creation idea, like that of all practical objects, should first meet the needs of residents' use function. According to their own living habits and social environment, the villagers make full use of the natural resources of grass, and form a relatively consistent mode of production and unique folk skills in the region through long-term production practice. Secondly, with the improvement of people's aesthetic level, there appeared practical and beautiful artworks. These straw weaving with different shapes and colors show the beauty of various forms of handicrafts, the beauty of natural materials of straws and the beauty of traditional culture of intangible cultural heritage.

#### 3.1 The Beauty of Form

In terms of form, the overall presentation of straw weaving handicrafts is mainly reflected in the connotation of national culture, such as the similar artistic images of totem culture. In the original image of prosperity brought by dragon and phoenix weaving, the art of straw weaving gradually developed the exaggerated image expression similar to snake, and even the deified 'dragon' image, a frog representing the image of the moon and a phoenix representing the image of the sun [6]. This is a manifestation of the life attitude of the general public, and a kind of emotional expression that pursues the quality of life and is full of positive attitude towards life. It can be seen from a variety of weaving techniques of straw weaving that the most unique form is its weaving itself, because special techniques will produce a variety of forms of expression at the same time in the process of utensils weaving, and individual weaving techniques themselves are a distinct form.

The surface formal framework of straw weaving handicrafts is rigorous, and most of the inspiration of patterns comes from life. It can be seen from the knitting patterns that the beauty of the wisdom of the craftsmen is that they visualize various abstract geometric patterns as graphic patterns in various lives, abstract specific social activities, and replace them with symbolic elements, which reflects the formal aesthetic principles of straw weaving.

Straw weaving handicrafts fully reflects the essential characteristics of design and the benign trend of social development [7]. In the creation of expressive forms, there are some creative rules and expressive rules about forms, which are gradually formed in people's early aesthetic and understanding. The final content of straw weaving handicrafts is constantly enriched with the change of the times and life content. But from the basic form of compilation, compilation pattern is still neat lines and natural raw materials, so as to create a comfortable human kindness. This is the unique charm of handicrafts, which also reflects the aesthetic principle in the form of structure proportion.

### 3.2 The Beauty of the Materials

The image of the art of straw weaving is basically animals and practical objects, with no human image. When selecting materials, it pays great attention to the materials suitable for the preparation of handicrafts, so the sere grass and the grass with poor flexibility will be excluded. So naturalness becomes the first choice for the beauty of straw weaving materials. Herbaceous plants resources are rich in China, and the main raw materials are cattail, reed, wheat straw, sorghum stalks, and corn husk, etc. However, with the continuous improvement of modern science and technology, all kinds of mechanical products and artificial synthetic materials products are filled in all fields of human life, which makes straw weaving handicrafts not only meet unprecedented challenges, but also faces a great opportunity for development. Because in the era of mechanical products flood, people will feel fatigue for so many handicrafts in the similar pattern. On the contrary, they are more and more interested in the handicrafts of natural materials, and thus put forward the slogan ‘return to nature’, which made straw weaving craftsmanship double its value, and is becoming increasingly widely involve more aspects of people's life. This also reflects the straw weaving handicrafts are the product of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, embodying the creation idea of ‘taking the nature and applying it to the people’.

The other hand is the beauty of just the right material. Materials are an important part of handicrafts. Without materials, all object design is just a thinking activity existing in the human brain, which cannot form a specific handicraft. Different materials have different attributes, and different materials will determine its final application, that is to say, the performance characteristics revealed by the material itself has initially determined the function of the artifact, or even the shape. Straw weaving mainly uses the upper stem part of matting straws, and from the perspective of color, matting grass has natural color. Although there are dyed matting grass, the dyes are plant dyes without chemical components. Straw weaving handicrafts mostly retain the colour and lustre of natural matting grass appropriately without overmuch decoration, and that is pair of ‘appropriate’ expression of materials.

### 3.3 The Beauty of the Culture

As one of the important parts of traditional folk handicrafts, the art of straw weaving has been inherited for a long time, and the materials and types of straw weaving are very rich. Biography of Dongfang Shuo in The Book of Han: ‘the articles woven by straw can be used as the mat for sleep.’ In the book of Fan Zi and Ji Ran, there is a saying: ‘at that time, the average value of cattail mat was about fifty to one hundred pennies.’ These are accurate records of straw weaving handicrafts.

As one of the important carriers of China's intangible cultural heritage, straw weaving handicraft has high collection and research value. However, due to its form, preservation conditions and historical reasons, there are still few complete records preserved today. Straw weaving is a traditional weaving process with herbaceous plants as the main raw materials. As one of the oldest skills of human beings, knitting has become an important means for Chinese ancestors to manufacture practical utensils in ancient times. The straw weaving technique has been spreading among Chinese people for thousands of years and has been continuously promoted in this process.

This art form with thousands of years of history has jumped out of the category of folk art itself. But as a part of the cultural life of the Chinese nation, it has its own artistic tension and aesthetic sentiment. These are the cultural and aesthetic characteristics of extension of straw weaving handicrafts. The value of straw weaving handicrafts today is not only the existence of practical utensils, but more the inheritance of inner creation ideas and emotional support, namely the inheritance of honest and naive handmade products and the yearning for a simple and natural rural life.

## 4. The Value Implication of Straw Weaving

Green design is related to the common interests of all human being, it, as a design concept, has already been agreed with different sectors [8]. straw weaving is a kind of green design material. At present, the expression of artistic characteristics of straw weaving craftsmanship has become a new development trend. At the same time, it also silently tells the emergence, development and enrichment of Chinese civilization, presenting the most real, simple and intelligent straw weaving aesthetic characteristics, which also makes straw weaving handicrafts gradually form their own unique value implication.

### 4.1 Spreading the Cultural Value of Straw Weaving

Straw weaving is an important theme to witness the development of national history. As the study of folk utensils, apart from the study of ‘utensils’ and the ‘principle’ existing in them, the research content of ‘belief’ must also be involved, that is, the folk culture generated around the utensils or the utensils as the carrier of folk culture [9]. It includes legends, myths, rituals, habits and other topics. The use value of folk craftsmanship is also being more transformed into cultural value. Straw weaving has entered people's folk culture life earlier, and spread many legends and folk customs.

Muchuan county, Sichuan province has preserved rich traditional folk customs. Weaving grass dragon is a unique local folk tradition, which was selected into the national intangible cultural heritage representative project list in 2008. Muchuan's grass dragon, also known as ‘yellow dragon’, is a folk grass tying skill popular in Muchuan County, Leshan City, Sichuan province. Muchuan Grass Dragon has a long history. According to legend, its origin is related to the history of sleeping with straw before Emperor Taizong ascended the throne. Therefore, later generations regard the dragon lanterns woven with straw as a symbol of auspiciousness and perform dances in public to pray for good weather and good harvest in the coming year.



Figure 2 The World's Best - Muchuan Grass Dragon

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#### 4.2 Inheritance of National Intangible Heritage Genes

Straw weaving, as one of the representative of national intangible cultural heritage, is an integral part of the Chinese nation traditional culture. Exploring its cultural value and aesthetic characteristics is to explore the history of the Chinese nation historical life charm and ways of thinking, reflecting the wisdom and hardworking Chinese exuberant vitality and unlimited creativity.

According to the report of the 19th CPC National Congress: ‘culture is the soul of a country and a nation. Culture invigorates the country, and culture strengthens the nation. Without a high degree of cultural confidence, and without the prosperity of culture, there will be no great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation [10].’ This is a series of important instructions for the inheritance of Chinese excellent traditional culture, the enhancement of cultural self-confidence, and the strengthening of the protection and utilization of intangible cultural heritage and the inheritance of heritage protection. It clearly requires that efforts should be made to find a road of national cultural protection in line with China’s national conditions, so as to make Chinese civilization shine on the road of development and point out the direction for the protection and utilization of intangible culture in the new era.

To tell Chinese historical stories well, it is necessary to learn the intangible cultural heritage language well first, strengthen the confidence of national culture and make reasonable use of all resources, and do a good job in the protection and utilization of cultural relics. Straw weaving, bearing the unique cultural characteristics and cultural background in the long history, its pure natural weaving craftsmanship perfectly presents the Concept of ‘man-nature harmony’ in Chinese culture, and is a unique cultural treasure.

Straw weaving (Muchuan Grass Dragon)	
Project number: 830	Project No.: VI-54
Date of Publication :2008(2nd Batch)	Category: Traditional art
Area: Xue, Sichuan province	Type: New item
Nominating unit (s) : Muchuan County, Sichuan Province	Protection unit: Muchuan County Cultural Center

Figure 3 List of Representative Items of Intangible Cultural Heritage

## 5. Conclusion

The most cutting-edge and innovative handicrafts often come from the most authentic folk wisdom and traditional culture. Straw weaving, as a living fossil of the folk for thousands of years, embodies the simple semantic meaning, simple wisdom and unique ethnic art style of Chinese ancestors, and also contains rich traditional culture and research value.

With the progress of society, people's living standards and aesthetics continue to improve. The rich modeling and decoration of woven products and traditional cultural attributes fit people's emotions more, arouse the resonance of public emotion, and meet people's emotional needs. Although today's products focus on modern design, the essence of traditional straw weaving is to serve the public. The straw weaving craftsmanship needs inheriting smoothly, and needs modern inheritors to integrate the modern and traditional straw weaving craftsmanship from the perspective of design innovation, in order to constantly seek better development. Keep the straw weaving handcrafts not only maintaining the original traditional style, but also not lacking the taste of fashion, can further promote their own development.

Adhering to the idea of carrying forward the connotation of straw weaving craftsmanship, highlighting the meaning of national culture, deeply analyzing the aesthetic characteristics of straw weaving craftsmanship, and enhancing the sense of identity and dissemination of straw weaving national craftsmanship at the same time, can push the Chinese traditional straw weaving craftsmanship onto a broader stage, and further promote the inheritance and protection of intangible cultural heritage.

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